

## The coastalisation of population in today's Russia: a socio-geographical explication

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THE COASTALISATION  
OF POPULATION  
IN TODAY'S RUSSIA:  
A SOCIO-GEOGRAPHICAL  
EXPLICATION

A. G. Druzhinin<sup>1, 2</sup>



*The coastalisation of population is considered as a prolonged, universal, although not a ubiquitous — socio-geographical process. This process is a result of the evolving spatial architecture of countries and regions, a lack of balance between the potential of leading cities, economic and settlement projections of global geoecological, geo-economic, and geopolitical processes, the scale and effect of transnational and transboundary contracts, and the changing images of coastal areas. This article analyses the trend towards the 'drift' of the demographic potential from the inland territories to the coastal periphery, which has been observed in Russia for centuries. A vast body of empirical data and statistics is used to demonstrate that, during the post-Soviet period, coastalisation has become city-centred and regionally/locally selective with a focus on the agglomerations of the Baltic, Caspian, and partly Azov-Black Sea coasts. The multi-scale phenomena of 'inverse coastalisation' and 'quasi-coastalisation' are analysed and relevant cases are considered. The author identifies numerous factors and explores prospects of the further coastalisation of population in the Kaliningrad and Leningrad regions and Saint Petersburg. The author argues that against the background of increasing socio-economic risks — particularly due to the change in Russia's geostrategic priorities — the coastal zones remain crucial to the new configuration of the country's settlement system.*

**Key words:** coastal cities, population change, maritime complex, cross-border contacts, Russia

### Introduction

The ideas of the significance of the *maritime factor* for economic and residential systems are traditional and, in general, dominant now. There is a sustainable and large-scale migration process of population from inland to

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coastal areas; this process is called *coastalisation* or, to put it in a different way, thalasso-attractiveness [1; 2]. Coastalisation is one of the most fundamental components of the territorial organization of society. Such ideas are based on the current social and geographical analytical data (multiple observations of the preferential concentration of population in coastal areas in global scale [3; 4; 5] and in country or regional formats [6, 7]), but also on the vision of the historical succession of Thalassocracies (*sea civilisations* in the works by L. I. Mechnikov [8]). These ideas are related to centuries-old economic practices (according to F. Brodel, location by the sea invariably "meant wealth" [9, p. 355]). These concepts resulted in ideologemes describing the power of the sea and its role in history [10], significant differences between coastal and inland areas [11] and the role of oceans in economic development [12].

Being at the same time a vector, a process, and a structured state, coastalisation increasingly acquires features of a stable and inherent component of the modern geographic picture of the world. The main geopolitical and geoeconomic interest of 'seaside states' is to have multidimensional benefits from their positioning, functionality, status, nature of involvement in micro-economic activities, largely provided by marine communications [13]). Since the end of the 1960s — beginning of the 1970s, the perception of coastalisation (including the geodemographic sphere [14; 15; 16; 17; 18]) has been tooted and cultivated in Russian science. In the 1970s, it took place against the background of the most active development of the country's port infrastructure and coastal recreational systems, making a *global footprint* of the country in the oceans. The situation has changed since then; there are newly created conditions [19] enhancing a steady and positive dynamics of port-logistics complexes, seaside towns and their agglomerations that have been emerging since the early 2000s. The aim of this article is to explain and describe the phenomenon of thalasso-attractiveness (coastalisation) in Russia, identifying its scale (including characteristics of the post-Soviet period), vectors and factors of attraction of population to sea coasts, as well as to explore perspectives of the studied phenomenon in the changing Eurasian and global context.

### Coastalisation in continental Russia: the centuries-old trend

The history of Russia is more often identified as *continental* rather than maritime. According to P. N. Savitsky, Russia itself is a continent [12]; it is an ocean of land, cut off from free seas that call and beckon" according to I. A. Ilyin [20]. But in fact, Russia's history is the history of incremental and subsequent development of its sea coasts (including their development by the Russian state and Russian culture). This process lasted for almost four centuries: it began with the foundation of Arkhangelsk and lasted till the formation of the Kaliningrad and South Sakhalin regions, which were established after the end of WWII). Hence, the basis of coastalisation was mainly provided by the centrifugal trend (from the inland regions to the outskirts of



the country expanding its frontiers). The interpretation of Russian colonisation as ‘longing for the sea’ [21] is symptomatic in this regard. Increasingly variable in their geographical characteristics, Russia’s coasts often appeared to be not only a contact-barrier areas, but also outer boundaries of the steadily expanding Russia’s geopolitical and geo-cultural frontier. Some of them have gained positional characteristics of almost a capital territory (for instance, Saint Petersburg and its surrounding area), or have developed transportation and logistics functions (Odessa, Rostov-on-Don, Taganrog, etc.). Other areas (for instance, Arkhangelsk, and Vladivostok, Murmansk) became the basis for the further development of peripheral (including coastal) areas.

The inclusion of coasts in Russia’s commercial and residential space and their increasing maritime capacity was accompanied with the formation and development of a network of coastal settlements. Coastalisation and its centrifugal dynamics were supplemented by the growing demographic attractiveness of seaside urban centres. According to the first census of the population, in 1897 among 56 cities of Russia whose population exceeded 50 thousand residents, 13 cities were either seaside cities or were located in the estuary of large navigable rivers. This fact illustrates the significant shift in the settlement system of the country towards coastal territories. This shift became particularly noticeable at the end of the XIX century.

Despite the initial predominance of the *continentalisation* [22; 23] trend, during the Soviet period the process of coastalisation continued. It acquired new vectors and forms. Industrialization (including the one in the maritime sector) turned the leading coastal cities into regionally significant points of the urbocentric migration, thus leading to their significant growth (table 1).

Table 1

**Population of some of the biggest seaports of Russia (thou. people)\***

	1897	1959	1989	2016
Saint Petersburg (Leningrad)	1264	3321	4678	5207
Rostov-on-Don	148**	600	1019	1115
Makhachkala (Petrovsk)	9,7	123	318	710
Vladivostok	29	299	634	607
Astrakhan	113	296	509	532
Sochi	14	187	337	468
Kaliningrad (Konigsberg)	190***	204	401	453
Sevastopol	54	152	393	409
Murmansk	—	222	468	305
Arkhangelsk	21	273	416	358
Novorossiysk	17	112	186	267
Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky	0,4	86	269	181

\* Compiled by the author based on the census data.

\*\* Together with the city of Nakhichevan-on-Don which is now a part of Rostov-on-Don.

\*\*\* Was not the part of the Russian Empire.



There is also apparent seasonal coastalisation, related to the development of tourism and recreation. Only during the period of 1961—1985, 3 cities and 30 urban-type settlements specializing in recreation were founded on the coasts of the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea [24]. The population were moving towards the Arctic and the Pacific frontiers. The 1959 census registered 66,000 inhabitants in Magadan, 86,000 in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, 80,000 in Severodvinsk, 22,000 in Naryan-Mar, 18,000 in Dudinka, etc. In thirty years the population of the coastal cities of the Arctic and Pacific ocean coasts of the USSR reached 3.4 million people. As in the previous historical periods, the process of coastalisation was considerably predetermined by the overall rhythm of the state, its capabilities and vectors of its strategic development. Coastalisation as a trend was based on the economic and demographic resources of Russia and, consequently, served the geopolitical and geo-economic interests of Russia, the continent of a country.

During the last Soviet decades, one could observe the so-called *mirror dynamics* of coastalisation. While in the whole USSR the demographic ‘weight’ of coastal areas generally declined (it is clearly stated in the study by V. V. Pokshishevskiy and G. M. Fedorov [17]), in the RSFSR (Russia), on the contrary, in 1959—1989 the share of the population of 17 coastal regions in the population of the Russian Federation increased from 15.7 to 18.1 %, or 8.3 million people. We can refer to these regions as thalasso-attractive ones [25]; these regions have a well-developed maritime complex and demonstrate a pronounced *urbanisation shift* to coastal areas. (during the period of geopolitical and geo-economic transformation) Coastalisation in the Russian Federation developed a greater spatial focus and invariance in the 1990s.

### Dominant factors and manifestations of coastalisation in the post-Soviet Russia

Since the demise of the Soviet Union, the coastline of the country has decreased by almost 11 thousand km. 25 out of 67 seaports and 10 out of 20 coastal cities with the population of more than 250 thousand people were located outside the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation. The Arctic shipping was in decline; the freight turnover along the Northern Sea route declined from 7 to 1.5 million tons in 1990—2000 [26]. The country was partly *pushed back* from the sea (especially from the most developed and climatically comfortable coasts) and faced a transformation crisis in almost all the major sectors of the maritime economy [19]. Simultaneously, being increasingly involved in the international division of labour, Russia focused on the arrangement of several maritime transport and logistics corridors (primarily providing for the development of European, or generally speaking, western direction of transaquatorial contacts). This process was accompanied by the ‘cringing’ of the economic and demographic potential [27], socio-economic ‘desertification’ of the peripheral regions of the country [28]. In these conditions, many coastal areas lost their attractiveness for the population. The

post-Soviet period is also associated with a natural population decrease, which was registered almost everywhere (Dagestan was the only exception). This type of coastalisation (thalasso-attractiveness) was even more urban-centric.

By the mid-1990s, the population decline (reaching its lowest at the beginning of the 2000s) had been registered in most coastal regions of Russia (except Leningrad, Kaliningrad and Astrakhan regions, Dagestan, and the Krasnodar region) (table 2).

Table 2

**Natural (NI) and migration (MI) dynamics in the population  
of thalasso-centred coastal regions of Russia, ppm\***

Regions	1990		1995		2005		2014	
	NI	MI	NI	MI	NI	MI	NI	MI
Saint-Petersburg	–14	12	–89	13	–72	128	13	102
Leningrad region	–15	57	–110	121	–123	146	–54	120
Kaliningrad region	29	71	–50	113	–92	33	–7	67
Arkhangelsk region	37	–22	–59	–31	–66	–73	–9	–68
Nenets autonomous district	97	–111	7	–251	23	–21	79	1
Murmansk region	55	–22	–33	–146	–38	–169	3	–65
Krasnodar region	–1	81	–53	133	–54	70	6	84
Astrakhan region	46	6	–34	79	–33	–6	23	24
Rostov region	0,0	49	–66	58	–67	21	–20	12
Republic of Dagestan	200	–25	144	73	95	55	136	–47
Kamchatka region	62	2	–21	–276	–15	–199	17	–98
Primorsk region	56	26	–37	–42	–58	–51	–6	–20
Magadan region	81	–173	–26	–742	–26	–180	3	–153
Sakhalin region	60	1	–81	–301	–61	–104	6	–59
Chukotka autonomous district	104	–230	12	–916	38	73	28	–30
<b>Russia in general</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>–57</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>–59</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>19</b>

\* Compiled with the data by Rosstat.

The reduction in the population was registered in all major coastal cities, including St. Petersburg (whose population declined during 1992—2008), Rostov-on-Don (depopulation prevailed in 1992—2001), Vladivostok (unfavourable demographic trend occurred in 1993—2009), Arkhangelsk (1992—2007), Sochi (2000—2007), etc. In general, during the period between the censuses of 1989 and 2002, the depopulation trend emerged in 50 of 74 cities located in the coastal zones of Russia (or in the estuary of major navigable rivers). Only 24 cities demonstrated a growth in population reaching a total of 455 thousand people; the share of Makhachkala was 32%, Sochi — 13%, Rostov-on-Don — 11%, Novorossiysk — 10% and Kaliningrad — 6%.



By the second half of the 2000s, the natural loss of the population had gradually slowed down. The centripetal migration flows became more noticeable (they were produced by increasing socio-economic gradients between the major cities and peripheral areas [29]). There was an obvious 'recovery trend' in the maritime sector of the country's economy. Given the dramatically changed social and geographical conditions, coastal cities of Russia demonstrated increasingly positive dynamics (unlike cities of Russia in general). During 2002—2010, 28 coastal cities had an increase in their population. It should be noted that the total growth figure (541 thousand people) was distributed between Makhachkala with its satellite cities (36%) and Saint Petersburg (35%).

The gradual increase in the population continued for a certain period. The number of coastal settlements having positive demographic indicators increased. In comparison with 2010, 41 cities (including almost all regional centres of Russia) demonstrated an upward demographic trend in 2016. The only exceptions were Murmansk and Gelendzhik. However, the rate of depopulation significantly slowed down there. The share of the regional centres in the total population growth was 49% due to a greater concentration of the population in Saint-Petersburg, the major coastal centre of Russia. During the last two years a visible demographic reversal has also been demonstrated by the cities of the Crimean coast (except Alushta).

As a result, in 1989—2016, the total population of the coastal cities of Russia increased by 6.2%, or 794 thousand people, reaching almost 13.7 million. It is equivalent to 95% of the demographic potential of all the coastal municipalities and 12.6% of the total urban population of the country. In 1989, the corresponding figure was 11.76%. Such a pronounced 'shift to the sea' appeared to be associated primarily with the process of spatial *concentration* of the population and its continuous redistribution and relocation to major cities. So, if in 1989 the coastal cities having the population of more than 500 thousand people accounted for 55.5% of the total population of all the coastal cities of the Russian Federation, in 2016 this figure was already 59.7%. On the contrary, the share of urban settlements with less than 50 thousand inhabitants decreased from 11.4 to 8.0%. The obtained analytical data show a steady redistribution of the population and its relocation to urban centres having or acquiring central administrative status (administrative centres of the regions of Russia or the so-called federal cities). During the analysed period, these cities increased their share in the demographic potential of the coastal cities from 73.6 to 75.0%.

With a higher concentration of the population in the largest coastal cities, there was a general and distinct *shift of the demographic potential towards the Baltic and the Caspian coasts*. The share of the Baltic coast macrozone in the population of the coastal cities of Russia increased by 2 percentage points in 1989—2016, and the share of the Caspian seaside macrozone — by 3.5 percentage points. Simultaneously, there was a reduction in the population numbers in the urban settlements of the Arctic coasts (by 3.2%) and the seaside towns of the Pacific macrozone (by 2.9%). Finally, coastalisation turned out to be completely in tune with the main post-Soviet shifts in the territorial organization of society and the geo-economic orientations of the country.



### Inversion of coastalisation and quasi-attractiveness of sea coasts

Coastalisation (or thalasso-attractiveness) is a universal phenomenon, but in its current form it is not widespread. Due to certain natural and socio-geographical factors the coastal areas may not be able to unlock their socio-economic and demographic potential; they may even lose their attractiveness over time due to some specific reasons. This fact gives rise to opposite effects, which can be referred to as the process of *counter-coastalisation* [30] and *inversion of coastalisation* [31].

With regard to coastalisation, the concept of its inversion (being invariant and complementary to the basic term) is designed to accommodate any kind of existing disproportions in the economic and residential development of a territory in favour of its inland areas. It reflects the predominant 'rejection' of migration flows by some coastal areas and a significant exodus of people from coastal zones. In Russia the process of coastalisation invariably occurs against the background of its polyscale inversions.

Almost 36,8 out of the total 41 thousand km of sea borders of the Russian Federation extend along its Arctic and Pacific coasts. Their development originally had a discontinuous, 'insular' character (as it is rightly stressed by A.N. Pilyasov [32]). These coastal areas are remote from the main settlement areas of the country (500 kilometers in the European part, 1000 km — in the Urals and up to 2000 km or more in Siberia). Consequently, they lost all state support in the post-Soviet period. In fact, they appeared to be in the position of semi-periphery, pronounced dependence and inequality of population exchange compared with its own regional capitals, but also with Murmansk, Arkhangelsk as the centers of Arctic shipping, as well as with federal metropolis cities and foreign beneficiaries. As a result, for the past twenty five years, only 4 of 34 urban settlements on the Arctic and Pacific coasts of Russia (from Murmansk to Vladivostok) have shown positive demographic dynamics (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Naryan-Mar, Salekhard and Artem). As for the total demographic loss, coastal cities of the Arctic and the Russian Far East, lost almost 600 thousand people during the Soviet period. This figure is more than the entire population growth of St. Petersburg during the same period and is equivalent to the population of Vladivostok, the main administrative centre on the Pacific coast.

It should be noted that the effects of coastalisation are clearly visible even in comparison with the prolonged and massive population outflow from the coasts. Diminishing demographic potential of the north and north-east Russia is partly compensated by the upward demographic and economic dynamics of coastal cities and towns, acting as stabilizers of the whole settlement system and its supporting frame. In 2016, the population of the coastal regions of Russia was only 71 % of the level of 1989 for the Pacific coast of Russia (the country's largest aqua-territorial macroregion [33]), and for the corresponding cluster of coastal cities the figure is 85.5%.

The inversion of coastalisation takes place also at the mezo-level. For instance, a sharp decline in population density and in the number of settlements is observed closer to the Gulf of Sivash in the Crimea [34]. A similar situation is observed in the southern part of the Gulf of Finland (to the west from Sosnovy Bor), where the asymmetry in the development of the coastal



zone and areas along the Saint-Petersburg — Narva motorway has prevailed for decades [35]. Only now this inversion is beginning to fade due to the development of the seaport in Ust-Luga.

In the post-Soviet period, the inversion of coastalisation was mainly associated with increasing centre-periphery gradients, resulting in the predominant concentration of the population in the Moscow region. In 2014, the total migration growth in the population of Moscow and the Moscow region accounted for 201 thousand people, while in St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region this figure was only 74 thousand inhabitants. The ratio of migration growth in the Moscow region and, for example, the coastal cities of the Kuban is 10:1. Having become even more apparent in the modern political and economic reality, the *non-equilibrium bi-centre structure* of the territorial organisation of the Russian society is now the major (on the national scale) determinant of coastalisation and its inversion. Since the eighteenth century this process has been taking place with a permanently altering redistribution of 'demographic weight' between Moscow and St. Petersburg.

It is important to note that population is attracted not so much to coastal zones as such but rather to the cities and towns located there. Coastal cities are attractive due to their functionality, size, status, positioning in the residential and commercial hierarchy of society. St. Petersburg and Rostov-on-Don are federal and macro-regional administrative cities located in the coastal zone. So, the rapid growth of their demographic potential can be only partly associated with coastal location. A similar (although not identical) situation is in Archangelsk and Vladivostok. In this case coastalisation has a quasi-character. It does not only embody the continent-ocean dichotomy [36] but also manifests itself in the unity with the process of metropolisation. The larger the coastal cities and the greater their status, the more maritime-continental they are. To a certain extent, the prefix *quasi* can be used to describe the situation on the Caspian coast of Dagestan (table 3).

Table 3

**Population dynamics in the coastal cities of Russia\***

City	1989	2002	2002/1989, %	2010	2010/2002, %	2016	2016/2010, %	2016/1989, %
<b>All coastal cities of Russia** including</b>	<b>12891,4</b>	<b>12658,2</b>	<b>98,2</b>	<b>13006,4</b>	<b>102,8</b>	<b>13685,4</b>	<b>105,2</b>	<b>106,2</b>
Saint Petersburg	4677,5	4661,2	99,7	4848,7	104,0	5207,0	107,4	111,3
The cities of Arctic and Pacific coasts	3364,1	2800,7	83,3	2742,5	97,2	2743,3	100,1	81,5
Cities of the coast of Dagestan	484,1	680,5	140,6	858,2	126,1	995,5	116,0	205,6
<b>Russia (the entire urban population)***</b>	<b>109638</b>	<b>108050</b>	<b>98,6</b>	<b>106661</b>	<b>98,7</b>	<b>108600</b>	<b>102,0</b>	<b>99,1</b>

\* Calculated by the author based on population censuses data and the current statistics.

\*\* Data for Russia including the Crimea.



During the past twenty five years, the demographic potential of Makhachkala agglomeration has doubled. On the background of very slow changes in the degree of urbanization of the territory, the urban population of the republic have significantly relocated to coastal areas. During 1990—2016, the number of people increased only 1.4 percentage points, and the share of coastal cities in the total urban population of the region increased from 60 to 73 %. At the same time, the urban population almost doubled due to natural growth and the role of the ‘sea factor’ did not play a decisive role in the explosive population growth of Makhachkala. A little over a century ago only 9.7 million inhabitants lived in this city. The share of the maritime sector in the GRP of the Republic of Dagestan does not exceed 2 % [37]. The development of Makhachkala agglomeration will be among the key factors demonstrating the role and significance of coastalisation in the medium and long term perspective.

### Conclusions

In the nearest future, Russia will face the problem of depopulation again. According to a pessimistic scenario of the Federal Statistics Service, it may start as early as in 2019. According to a more optimistic scenario depopulation will occur in 2024. This process will affect almost all coastal areas; it will develop simultaneously with the shrinking of the labour market due to technological progress. This trend will be particularly noticeable in the Arctic zone where automated technologies are widely used. Such perspective implies a further disintegration of the existing settlement system [38]. Against this background, the concentration of human capital, infrastructure and future resources in major urban areas (including coastal ones) [39] will continue. Positive demographic trends in coastal areas will be supported by the revival of Russia’s maritime complex and the development of the main transport corridors (St.-Petersburg, Novorossiysk, Vladivostok, Rostov-on-Don, Kaliningrad). This trend will be accompanied by a widening gap between economic and demographic indices of coastal areas and the adjacent economic and transport centres. The overall climatic, infrastructural, geographic relief and architectural environment will become a significant factor for coastalisation; it will create better chances for self-employment (in the tourist-recreational and agricultural sectors, as well as in the sphere of ‘shuttle’ trade). This will ensure an inflow of population to the Black Sea coast of Kuban (in the triangle Krasnodar-Taman-Sochi), and also to the Rostov and Vladivostok regions, the cities of Crimea, and the coastal areas of the Kaliningrad region. The population of the Caspian coastal areas will continue to grow forming the Eurasian Mediterranean whose economic opportunities will be explored in the future.

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